

Honoring Springdale Native Rachel Carson

April 23, 2007

Watch the speech

Mr. ALTMIRE. This is a very special day for me. I grew up in southwestern Pennsylvania, right across the river from Springdale, Pennsylvania, where Rachel Carson was born and raised and where she is truly a legendary figure. She is an icon in western Pennsylvania, and this is a very special year for Rachel Carson's memory because May 27, 2007, would have been Rachel Carson's 100th birthday.

And she has received tremendous honors throughout her life. We do have, as the gentleman said, bridges named after her and schools and other things. But I can think of no greater representation for the beginning of Rachel Carson and the beginning of the modern environmental movement than to have the post office in her hometown of Springdale named after her. And, ironically, Springdale itself last year celebrated its centennial, so she was born in the very early days of Springdale. And this bill has widespread support throughout the district that I represent, the Fourth Congressional District where Springdale is located, but also throughout all of western Pennsylvania and all of Pennsylvania. And I do thank the gentleman for his kind remarks. But I wanted to talk a little bit about Rachel Carson.

As I said, she was born in 1907 in Springdale. She graduated from the Pennsylvania College for Women, which currently is known as Chatham College. And Rachel Carson got her degree in English, which would serve her well in her writing career over the years. She earned her master's degree in zoology from Johns Hopkins University, so she has very strong ties to Maryland, and I am going to talk a little bit more about that because she taught zoology at the University of Maryland, right down the road from where we are right now. And while she continued her studies at the Marine Biological Laboratories in Woodshole, Massachusetts, she continued her teaching career. So in the very early days, she was getting to know the environment and getting a greater understanding of the world around her and what was to come in her life.

Now, according to Time Magazine, "It was there in her early twenties that she first saw and became enchanted with the enormous mysteries of the sea." And as I talked about, this was a lifelong passion for Rachel Carson. Her early writings at the time focused on the waters and the seas, and I believe a lot of that has to do with her upbringing in Springdale, Pennsylvania, because the Allegheny River flows right through the town there, right along the river, and she spent a lot of time studying the river in her youth growing up. And the Rachel Carson homestead, which is her childhood home, has been restored. And there is an active and ongoing presence there in the town, and the stories are legendary about her spending hours and hours of time sitting there on the riverbank, studying the waters and thinking about it. And those who knew her at the time knew that that was her passion and that was going to be the direction of her career and her life.

In 1936 she went to work as a junior aquatic biologist at the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, again very suitable to someone with that level of interest and that educational background. She was the second woman in the history of the agency to hold a full-time professional position. So she was a trailblazer right from the start. And her early writings, as the gentleman from California mentioned, *Under the Sea-Wind*, *The Sea Around Us*, and *The Edge of the Sea*, celebrated the wonders of nature and continued her ongoing expertise and interest in aquatics and the sea. *The Sea Around Us* won the John Burroughs Medal, which was then the equivalent of what is today the National Book Award. So here we

see the beginnings of a writing career. And this is where her English degree comes back, and she now has expertise in not only zoology and water and the Bureau of Fisheries as her profession, but she begins a long and fruitful career as an author, so she wins what is then the equivalent of the National Book Award. And within the first year, this was in the 1930s, that book sold over 200,000 copies.

Rachel Carson is most famous, of course, for her book, *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962, and it criticizes the use of pesticides, particularly DDT, but not exclusively. It is widely credited with launching the modern environmental movement, including Earth Day, which just over this past weekend we celebrated Earth Day all across the country while Rachel Carson is credited with the founding of that movement as well. So, again, this is a very timely measure today, and I do encourage my colleagues to support it.

I did want to mention that, unfortunately, it was not long after the publishing of *Silent Spring* that Rachel Carson took ill and breast cancer took her life at the early age of 56, in 1964. But that did not end the legacy of Rachel Carson. In 1980 she was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which all of our Members here know that is an incredible honor to be bestowed upon someone. And in 1999 *Time Magazine* recognized Rachel Carson as one of the 20th century's 100 most influential Americans, again a fantastic and well-deserved honor.

So, again, throughout western Pennsylvania this year, her 100th birthday we are celebrating Rachel Carson. And it is important, having just had Earth Day over the weekend and the increasing awareness of the environment around us, that we do allow Springdale Township, where this is a very popular measure and something that we have been waiting to see this day come. I would ask my colleagues to show their support and recognize the tremendous contributions that Rachel Carson has had not only for western Pennsylvania, not only for the United States of America, but around the world. She truly is an icon, and she truly did change the world.

So at this time I would like to thank the gentleman from Illinois for allowing me to bring this bill forward. I thank the committee, and I thank the gentleman from California.